

Rome, Open City, Part II

Director: Roberto Rossellini (1945)

A hand holding a lit cigarette points at a map of Rome. “The city will be divided into fourteen sectors,” a voice says, as the hand gestures. The speaker is Major Bergmann (Harry Feist), the local SS commander. On the map, we see the boundaries dividing the sectors.

As the camera pulls back, the Roman Police Commissioner (Carlo Sindici) enters the frame. Bergmann continues, “The Schroder Plan, which we have already implemented in various European cities, permits the surgical dragnet of large numbers of men with a minimum force.”

“Ah!” The Commissioner nods.

There’s a knock at the door. “Come in,” Bergmann says, in German.

A soldier enters and gives the Nazi salute. “Sergeant Bauer phoned, sir. They didn’t find the person in question.”

“No? That’s odd.”

“The landlady and the housekeeper were there. Shall we bring them in?”

“No, that’s not necessary. Thank you.”

The soldier salutes once again and leaves.

Bergmann walks to his desk.

“Unpleasant news?” asks the Police Commissioner.

“Someone missed an appointment.”

“An important person?”

“I hope so.” He opens a drawer, takes out some photographs, and passes one to the Commissioner.

“Do you know them?”

The Commissioner holds up the photograph. It shows a man and woman standing on the stairs of Piazza di Spagna. The church of the Trinità dei Monti looms behind them.

“No,” he replies. “Who are they?”

The two men sit down, facing each other across Bergmann’s desk. The desk lamp illuminates the figures, while much of the room remains in shadow. “He goes by the name of Manfredi, engineer.”

“Manfredi?”

“Ja,” the other man confirms in German.

“That name was brought to our attention. It seems he’s one of the heads of the military council of the National Liberation Committee.”

“I have good reason to believe it’s the same man.”

“How did you spot him?”

“I met him while sitting right here at this desk,” Bergmann answers, gesturing. He leans back. “Every evening I take a long stroll through the streets of Rome, without leaving my office.”

“I really love this sort of photograph that catches people almost unaware,” he says contentedly, reaching for a pile of images on his desk. “One has such interesting encounters.”

“Some time ago, for example, I came across Mr. Manfredi and his little girlfriend.”

The Commissioner is listening attentively. Reaching into a drawer on his left, Bergmann pulls out

another pile of photographs. "I told myself, 'I've seen this man someplace.' Look at this group, for example." He hands the photo across the desk.

"The second from the left. I received these from Berlin," he explains, handing him a magnifying glass. "I don't think I'm wrong, am I?" We see the magnifying glass enlarge the figure in each image, as the Commissioner makes the comparison.

"Of course not," he says. "It's him. They are the same person!" They're interrupted by an agonized howl from another room. "How tiresome!" Bergmann stands. "Excuse me."
"Of course."

The Major presses a button on his desk as the cries of pain continue. A soldier enters the room and gives the Nazi salute.

"What's all that noise?" Bergmann demands.
"Forgive me, Major. We're interrogating that professor –"

"Fine, but keep him quiet." The soldier leaves.
"How these Italians scream!" Bergmann complains to the Italian Police Commissioner, who responds, returning to his magnifying glass, "Indeed."

Then he looks up suddenly. "And who's the girl?"
"A certain Marina Mari, a cabaret performer." The German's face is a mask of disgust.

"Oh, yes, I know who she is. I've seen her. Pretty!" In the lamplight, the Italian gazes at the German with delight.
"Very pretty..." As the camera frames the Major, the light picks up the silver eagle, the braided epaulettes, the row of medals, and the iron cross: the symbols of his power.